

NOTES

First record of the White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus* for Thailand

Whilst looking for birds on the mudflats bordering the campus of the Prince of Songkla University, near Pattani (approx. 6°53'N; 101°16'E), we saw an adult White-tailed Tropicbird in the late afternoon of 15 October 1984. At a distance we were initially attracted by its direct, level flight with regular wingbeats, quite different from the erratic swooping shown by White-winged Terns *Chlidonias leucoptera* and Gull-billed Terns *Gelochelidon nilotica*, which were hunting over the sea and mudflats at that time. It flew in a nearly straight line from west to east at a height of about 8 m above the bare mudflats and passed us at a distance of about 10 m as it flew further into Pattani bay.

The bird was about the size of a Gull-billed Tern but looked more thickset. It had two remarkably long, white streamers in the central tail. With the aid of our 10 x binoculars, we could see many details as the bird passed by and was viewed against a background of dark clouds. We noted the yellow-orange bill, which was stout at the base and the dark eye. The plumage was pure white, but a broad, black line extended from the lores through the eye to the ear coverts. A more or less diagonal black band extended across the upperwing. This was broad near the rump and tapered towards the wrist. The outer primaries were mostly blackish.

By its general appearance and the greatly elongated central tail feathers, the bird was identified at once as an adult Tropicbird. The white neck, white mantle and rump, together with the dark outer primaries and the typical, black band on the upperwing, clearly indicated that it was a White-tailed Tropicbird, *Phaethon lepturus* (ALEXANDER, 1963; HARRISON, 1983).

The White-tailed Tropicbird is a pelagic seabird living in the tropical and sub-tropical zone of the world oceans. According to the map given by HARRISON (1983), birds can be seen in the Indian Ocean, South China Sea and the Indonesian waters, but do not usually enter the Gulf of Thailand or the Gulf of Bengalen. The nearest breeding places of the nominate form are found on the Cocos Keeling Islands and the Maldives. A record of breeding on the Adaman Islands (ALEXANDER, 1969) is doubted by Harrison (1983). The yellow-coloured subspecies *fulvus* breeds on Christmas Island; other subspecies are found in the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

As far as we know this is the first record of the species for the coastal waters of mainland S.E. Asia (LEKAGUL & CRONIN, 1974; Harrison, 1983; King et al., 1975).

REFERENCES

- ALEXANDER, W.B., 1963. *Birds of the Ocean*. Putnam, New York, 306 pp.
HARRISON, P., 1983. *Seabirds: an Identification Guide*. Croom Helm, Beckenham, 448 pp.
KING, B., M. WOODCOCK and E.C. DICKINSON, 1975. *A Field Guide to the Birds of South-East Asia*.

Collins, London, 480 pp.

LEKAGUL, B. and E.W. CRONIN, 1974. *Bird Guide of Thailand*. Asso. for the Conservation of Wildlife. Bangkok, 324 pp.

C. Swennen

Netherlands Institute for Sea Research

Postbox 59

1790 AB Den Burg (Telex)

The Netherlands.

E.C.L. Marteiijn